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Harassment of Spy Hero, Congressional Investigator, Is Revealed

He Learns Peril of Political Warfare

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

Washington, April 3 — What happens to the real-life James Bonds of the shadowy world of espionage and intrigue when they retire from official service?

What is their lot when, after a life of danger in coping with their communist counterparts in faraway lands, they are forced to seek more peaceful pursuits and a living for themselves and their families?

One of these anonymous heroes of the United States army's intelligence and counter-intelligence corps has found the answer in recent months.

He has been subjected to a campaign of harassment and character assassination, designed to deprive him of a congressional committee post in which he could use his vast knowledge to assist investigations and subversions here and abroad.

Exploits Still Secret

This is the story, never told before, of Lt. Col. Philip J. Corso, 49, who retired in 1963 after more than two decades of military service which ranged from Africa to Italy to Korea. Assigned for most of those years to military intelligence, many of his exploits are still classified.

The Russians denounced him as a "terrorist" and his own government loaded him with decorations and commendations. During the Eisenhower administration, his counsel on intelligence problems was a factor in White House decisions.

He is now finding that political warfare on Capitol hill is no less deadly than strife with the masters of espionage in the Kremlin.

Corso is far removed from the swashbuckling types popular in the works of Ian Fleming and other purveyors of spy fiction.

He's Mild-Mannered

The son of a Pennsylvania steel mill worker who migrated from Italy early in the century, he is short and powerful but unimpressive in appearance. He wears eyeglasses and his demeanor is mild. He never raises his voice.

The deceptive quality of this attitude was impressed upon Communists when Corso was assistant chief of staff, G-2, of the allied command in Rome in 1945, and thus the top American intelligence officer in the area.

He was informed by a high Italian official one day that his name and the names of several of his assistants had been marked by communist partisans in Rome for death. Verifying the report, he summoned his counterpart in communist intelligence.

"I hear you are out to get me and some of my men," Corso said. "As it is, I want you to know what will happen if you make any attempt upon me or my men, even if you miss. Here is a list of 12 of your men. Your name is at the top. I have left orders, which will be performed even if I'm dead, that will result in 12 bodies floating in the Tiber. I think you know that I am serious."

The deliberately dramatic threat proved effective. No attempt to harm American intelligence officers was ever made in Rome. Asked if he had indeed ordered the deaths of

12 men, Corso remarked: "The Communists thought I had. That was what counted."

When Corso left Rome in 1947, he was thanked by Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi for helping to restore law and order and prevent a communist take-over.

Reds Call Him Terrorist

The communist press, after his departure, featured a four-page spread on the American "terrorist." The Italian government awarded him the war cross and the Order of the Crown of Italy. The defense department, by special order, permitted his acceptance of these awards.

His 17 decorations include the legion of merit, bronze star, and commendation medal with three oak leaf clusters.

Ordered to the far east at the outbreak of the Korean War, he became chief of the special projects branch, G-2, and earned note as an expert on the intelligence system of the communist enemy. His report on communist organization and methods in prisoner of war camps earned him a citation. Henry Cabot Lodge, American ambassador to the United Nations, wrote Corso a personal letter of thanks in 1954 for material which helped him to combat Russian propaganda in the U. N.

Agent by Accident

Corso became an intelligence expert by accident. He grew up in the small town of California, Pa., 30 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, and was studying to be a technical engineer when the draft took him as a private. He was to remain in uniform 21 years.

Commissioned a second lieutenant in 1942, he was ordered to military intelligence training school where his talents were quickly apparent. He was sent

to north Africa, later to Italy as a combat intelligence officer, then began his tour as the top intelligence man in Rome. He is fluent in Italian, also has a command of French and Spanish.

Much of Corso's career remains hidden in highly classified files. The information he possessed was so sensitive that for two years after he left the army he was barred from visiting iron curtain countries.

Assets and Liabilities

At the age of 47, he surveyed his assets. He had an impressive title, deputy chief, foreign technology division, under Gen. Arthur G. Trudeau, who esteemed him highly. He had remained a lieutenant colonel for 10 years, however, and further promotion would be slow.

He also had a heavily mortgaged home and an old car, although he had handled enormous secret funds in past years. His bank balance was less than \$100. He had two children of high school age and an uncompensated wife.

When Sen. Strom Thurmond [R., S. C.] offered Corso a post as staff assistant, he decided to retire from the army. Thurmond wanted his assistance in an investigation of the defense department's censorship policies. This became known as the "muzzled generals" hearing.

Whether Corso stepped on the toes of powerful persons in that inquiry or whether he was reaping the results of enmities gained in his long years of

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intelligence is not known.

Campaign Is Revealed

The campaign to destroy his usefulness as a congressional investigator emerged into the open early this year after Corso, with Thurmond's reluctant assent, accepted a post offered by Rep. Michael A. Feighan [D., O.], chairman of a House judiciary committee on immigration and nationality.

Feighan wanted Corso's assistance in handling a potentially explosive investigation of an international black market featuring the sale of American visas to refugees behind the iron curtain. The justice department is opposed to his inquiry. It fears an administration scandal.

The subcommittee, regarding Corso's credentials with awe, voted unanimously to confirm his appointment as a staff member. Chairman Emanuel Celler [D., N. Y.], who is also hostile to Feighan's investigation, objected to the appointment.

Asked for Reasons

Asked for an explanation, he produced a memorandum purporting to be from Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach, which cited reasons why Corso should not be employed.

One charge against Corso was that he had prepared for Gen. Trudeau, then chief of army intelligence, a list of names in connection with United States policy from 1947-1955. Corso was alleged to have stated that this list was the key to so-called Fabian-Socialists in the government.

Turdeau gave the list to J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The list was later placed in the files of the Senate internal security subcommittee with the authority and approval of the defense department.

It has never been made public and the charge against Corso failed when it was shown that the report made no mention of Fabian-Socialists but merely showed the positions held by people influential in making policy.

Another Rumor Bared

Corso was also alleged to have said that Lee Harvey Oswald, assassin of President Kennedy, was an agent for the central intelligence agency.

were that Corso, solicited for information in connection with the Warren commission inquiry, reported that a certain Communist in Texas was spreading the rumor that Oswald was an FBI agent.

The information was passed on to the FBI which had already denied that Oswald ever worked for the FBI. The FBI asked Corso for the source of his information. He refused. The FBI later informed Corso that it considered the incident closed.

The major "crime" lodged against Corso, it finally developed, was that he had testified before the Senate internal security subcommittee in 1961, giving information covering government policy and policy implications for a 10-year period.

Testimony Kept Secret

The testimony was never made public because it covered "sensitive" national security council matters. Corso had been a staff member of the operations coordinating board in the White House from 1954 to 1957.

Thus, Feighan told Celler, the major issue bearing upon Corso's suitability for a staff appointment was:

"Should any individual who has been called before a committee of the Senate or House, with full approval and authority of his superiors, be penalized or put under suspicion as a shady or undesirable character?"

"A serious legal and moral issue arises when an unofficial and unsigned report [a reference to the memorandum from Katzenbach to Celler] on an individual from any branch of the executive department is considered as trustworthy information."

Called Rights Violation

"Such procedure opens the door to character assassination of loyal and able citizens who have no recourse or remedy. It violates their civil rights in a most serious manner. A practice of this type is destructive of our institutions and violates every reasonable procedure."

Another government employee, Otto F. Otepka, a veteran state department officer, was discharged in 1963 from his post because he testified before the internal security sub-

committee. He has appealed and is awaiting a hearing.

Corso thus far has retained his committee job. Feighan is proceeding with his investigation which may strike persons in the government. Celler has not changed his position that Corso is unacceptable but has not insisted upon his discharge. Corso may occasionally long for the comparatively peaceful years when the only enemy was a c communist spy.